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Bard

WHAT I REALLY WANT TO SAY

for Steven Holl

is about poetry (always)
is about architecture I mean music,
yes. How can I tell them
apart? I'll try.

How they use us
to make us become ourselves.

What I really wanted to say
is about poiesis
the Greek verb *poiein* means to make
so anybody who makes anything
has to be a poet

so when we were evicted by spirit from the caves
we moved into houses
structures built by the first poets,
the architects

isn't the house the first thing they, we, really made?

So poetry and music make time pass
and architecture makes space pass

into meaningful form.

No.

I mean architecture makes music stand still.

That's more like it:

here time turns into space

Space and place, can they be the same?

Place happens to space,
is architecture *in* a place
or does it make the place
itself happen to space.

The way music happens to time.

So there is usually a street and sometimes a fountain
—a thing that moves up and glistens while the eye reaches out and out—
and there's a girl walking by and another eating lunch on a bench
because a place is a plaza.

But what I really wanted to say
is that the poem stretches on and on
like an avenue of mysterious buildings
who on earth lives in all those houses
apartments single rooms
who climbs down the stairs or stumbles at midnight,
who opens the brass letter boxes o my god

who are all these people
eating their lunch in the middle of the poem
and looking at each other and wondering what it all means
and then they come to the end of a line and decide
well enough of this it's time to go home
home to their room
home to their own place.

What I really wanted to say
was that the word 'room' really means 'space'—
like German *Lebensraum*, space to live in—

is there room for living
in this poem you're writing
o poet and o composer
are you leaving space in your music
for someone to live in, really and truly
be alive *inside* your music,
not just some background noise,
not just some sad background-life while you drone on?

I know it's not polite to ask
but we sort of know what architecture does
rough and ready we inhabit it
and when we're lucky it changes us,
guides our footsteps and the way
we feel about doing

whatever we're doing that brings us there,
swinking or swiving, a building holds all.

So what I really wanted to say
was that these arts do something to time as it goes by
not just make it pass
as Beckett had his losers say, the time will pass by itself all right,
it knows how to do that,
or that is all time knows.

And do we know more
than what music tells us as it flows past?
We sit in the plaza on a marble bench and read poems to one another
whispering or waving our arms and why not,
somebody has to make things move,

make the shadows dance in and out
of the shadows of great buildings.

But does time ever really pass?
Isn't time just a superstition,
a flaw in our attention to the permanent?
And if time passes
can we learn how to stop it
and make it pool out around us
so that we stand or sit
in the shallow water of moveless time,

this static stream

**or time might be a fountain
springing up and falling down
a salmon-leap of time out into space,**

**into room,
so that when we see a building we know that time is safe there,
an artist's hour hammered into place
and we can be, just be.
Has he turned time into space?**

**What I really wanted to say
was there and back again,
the swell of music
held in the mouth of the poem
spoken to the girl eating her lunch
in the great nest of plazas
of many levels Steven Holl
built in China, a city in a city,
a poem someone is reciting,
annoying the poor girl eating her lunch,
my god how can I look at that plaza
and not start writing a poem,
a poem with musics and levels and fountains and food,**

it's hard work to eat

chewing and swallowing
all the inward mysteries thereafter,
hard work
the poem and the song,
Hegel famously remarked a building is a frozen song,
well yes, but everything is,
what I really wanted to say
was that everything approximates music
but a building is *exact*,
demands space move its hips and shoulders
this way not that way,

or is architecture also a chanceful music,
turning space into space
so that we can get lost for a long time,
in a long song
of corridors and pentagons and Moorish geometries,

the way John Cage's 4'33" turns time into time,
our dear Christless fundamentalist,
our sweet raw Pythagoras,

daring to turn common time into pure time-
time transmuted by attention—
he'll never let us be sure
if he was the great Alchemist or the Wizard of Oz,

but the time changed. And stays changed,
he moved on to the next town
and left us with an empty room full of pure time.

We shake our heads and say Next time we'll do better,
we'll be ready for him, and dance to his tune.
But what does "next time" mean?

Can there be another time
after this time?
That's where poetry comes in,
and if quoting myself I should say again
time transmuted by attention
a measured, noticed time
is as much music as Heinrich Biber's,
the glorious whine of whose archaic strings
won't leave you alone for a second,

she looks up from her paper plate
and hears the time singing round her ears
spoken by the shapes and shades of great buildings
and now she knows, and now she's only now.

Can a poem, though,
such as I'm trying to make
or bend your way now,
can a man outlast time?

Can it get where it's going before I get there?

**When I was a child the greatest thrill
was riding on the escalator
Macy's Gimbel's Wanamaker's
floor to floor and always rising
and no one to stop
even a child from going up
and watching the people
on the way down, clutching bags
neat brown packages, content,
descending into ordinary space
while I rose up, finally reaching
the dim cool floor where furs were sold
and I turned back from the fear of dead animals,
what could it mean to live in a world
where animals die and their skins
rest on lovely women of a certain age,
that's why we hurry down again
to the ordinary floors, the street,
the paper plates littering the gutter,
she's closed her book and gone back to work,
the half-eaten sandwich, the poem
read halfway through and never finished.**

**But something was always going up,
even if we didn't have the wit or will to endure its beauty,**

like James Tenney's electronic *For Anne, Rising*,
where the sound goes up and up and never stops that climb
but is always present, or Joan Tower's wonderful *Platinum Spirals*,
violin conquering time by rising always in one place,

or when the thunder walks through the valley
and everybody and everything knows itself
suddenly walked into by that sound,

invaded, persuaded, frightened, spared—

What I really wanted to say
was that I'm tired of poetry being a blueprint not a house
I'm tired of music being something that comes and goes
I want the word to be a house
and the tune to be something you climb on and travel
but how can I say that?

What I really wanted to say
is how can words make you hear
how can words make—

a poem is something made
can it make a place you can actually walk
around in, stretch out in,
reach a wall you can lean against
warm in sunlight and close your eyes?

**What I really wanted to say
was that poetry wants to close your eyes
so you open them suddenly in a new space,
the way doors and windows do
o these architects these poets
who can build an opening
anywhere they choose
can open space and let us in**

**but can I break open even a single
word to make you see?**

1 August 2013

[7 September T/Space]